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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000864

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, R, DRL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CONTRARY TO REPORTS, RELEASED  
RFE/RL'S DURDYMURADOV CLAIMS NO TORTURE

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0808  
[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0807  
[1](#)C. ASHGABAT 0811  
[1](#)D. ASHGABAT 0820  
[1](#)E. ASHGABAT 0826  
[1](#)F. ASHGABAT 0801

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4(b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During a July 9 meeting with EmbOff, recently released RFE/RL contributor Sazak Durdymuradov appeared to be healthy and relaxed. Durdymuradov said that he had not been physically or mentally tortured or mistreated in any way, but confirmed that doctors in the psychiatric facility had examined him. He indicated he had not had contact with family members while he was in either the police station or the psychiatric facility, contrary to what the RFE/RL reporter told us and broadcast. Although he had been fired from his job, Durdymuradov believed that he would be able to resume teaching. He also wanted to continue as an RFE/RL contributor. We are pleased that Durdymuradov was released and that he was not tortured. However, we are disturbed that the more sensational version of events, told us by a local RFE/RL reporter and which made it into the international press via the Reporters Without Borders open letter using the RFE/RL reporter's material, appears not to be true. See comment in paras 12-13. END SUMMARY.

NO OBVIOUS SIGNS OF DURESS OR MISTREATMENT

[1](#)2. (C) During a July 9 meeting in an Ashgabat cafe, RFE/RL contributor Sazak Durdymuradov talked to EmbOff and Public Affairs FSN about his experience from June 20, when he was detained by neighborhood police, to the time he was released on July 4. Durdymuradov was accompanied by RFE/RL reporter Halmurat Gulychdurdiyev. Throughout the meeting, Durdymuradov appeared to be relaxed and in good health, and pleased to talk about his recent experience. Both EmbOff and FSN separately said afterward that they had seen no indication -- no bruises, no problems walking or other signs of ill health -- that he had been physically mistreated or was under any kind of psychological duress.

#### DURDYMURADOV'S STORY STARTS WITH COMPLAINT BY BROTHER

13. (C) According to Durdymuradov, his experience started when several neighborhood policemen came to him and said that his brother had sent a letter alleging Durdymuradov's repeated mistreatment of students at the institute where he taught. Durdymuradov noted to EmbOff that he felt this was just a pretext to take him to the police station, as many of these complaints were allegations from the 1990's that had long since been resolved. (COMMENT: The alleged involvement of his brother tracks reasonably with the Government of Turkmenistan's final version that Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov told the Charge on July4 (ref E). END COMMENT.)

#### NO PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE WHILE IN DETENTION

14. (C) On June 20, The police took Durdymuradov to Abadan police station, just outside of Ashgabat. At the police station, personnel took away his cellphone and wallet and would not allow him to contact his family. (NOTE: Durdymuradov said that he had left his passport at home, so this was not confiscated. END NOTE.) Three plain-clothes officers questioned him, asking why he had cooperated with RFE/RL. They also questioned him about an open letter he had written in the past, co-signed by 100 students, petitioning the government to end the mandatory study of the Ruhnama in schools. Durdymuradov mentioned that he had written this letter to both the Niyazov and Berdimuhamedov regimes legally

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under constitutional law. After the interrogation, he was taken to a cell and left overnight. While conditions in the cell were poor, he said he was not physically or psychologically harmed in any way.

#### COMMITTEE QUESTIONS DURDYMURADOV, CONCLUDES HE'S MENTALLY ILL

15. (C) At noon on June 21, he was taken to a room where a committee of eight people repeated many of the same questions -- "Why did you work with RFE/RL?" "Why did you write the letter to the government?" "What business is it of yours dealing with all these people -- who do you think you are?" The committee also questioned him about the opposition party that he had expressed interest in creating. Durdymuradov replied that he had wanted to start this party, which he called "Interests of the People," for many years. Durdymuradov told EmbOff that he had written a letter to President Niyazov about this long ago and had been open about the process from the very beginning.

16. (C) Durdymuradov told EmbOff that he considered the commission very rude and he thought their questions were the most psychologically damaging part of his entire experience. The eight-person committee told Durdymuradov that they found him to be mentally ill, and that he would be taken to a psychiatric facility for treatment. At 20:00 that evening, Durdymuradov was taken to the Ashgabat train station by two policemen. There, he was turned over to two city health officials who, seeing that he had no money, bought him a meal and gave him some pocket cash. He was put on an overnight train to Turkmenabat, where he was taken to the psychiatric hospital early on the morning of June 22.

#### NO OUTSIDE CONTACT WITH FAMILY

17. (C) Durdymuradov stated that the facility's doctors immediately could tell he was not mentally ill and clearly a political prisoner. As such, he was treated courteously by the staff. While he was given a physical by a team of doctors, they did not drug him or subject him to electroshocks. Durdymuradov acknowledged that he was scared when left alone with the other patients, many of whom were mentally ill and potentially dangerous. Still, he described the conditions as decent -- he was given adequate nourishment

and was not harassed by either guards or doctors. However, he was allowed no outside contact. Durdymuradov told EmbOff that his family had received information regarding his arrest from Gulychdurdiyev.

#### MNB QUESTIONS REGARDING TREATMENT AT CLINIC

¶8. (C) At 22:30 on July 3, Durdymuradov was awakened by the guards and taken outside, where three people were waiting for him: Kemal, one of the medical officers who had put him on the train to Turkmenabat, a driver and a man named "Geldi" who claimed to be a provincial national security officer. Geldi went over Durdymuradov's case file with him, listing all the activities that might have been "subversive." Based on Geldi's breadth of knowledge, Durdymuradov surmised to EmbOff that he was an Ashgabat-based Ministry of National Security (MNB) officer. The three men took Durdymuradov to the local MNB building, where they questioned him on his treatment in the clinic. Having replied that he had not been harmed in any way, he signed a document stating that he had not been physically or psychologically mistreated and that he had been provided decent meals. Geldi mentioned that there was a lot of international attention on his case and that he would be released soon.

DURDYMURADOV RELEASED WITH NO PRECONDITIONS EXCEPT TO "TELL TRUTH"

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¶9. (C) On July 4, he was released from the clinic and was returned by train to Ashgabat. Durdymuradov said that although Geldi told him he would be reinstated in his job, this has not yet occurred.

¶10. (C) Sometime between July 5 and 6 (Durdymuradov could not recall exactly), he was approached in Ashgabat by Geldi, who asked him to make a statement in front of a camera. He was given a speech that said he had been mentally ill and was taken to the clinic for treatment. Durdymuradov said that he had refused to make the speech, since it was not correct. Instead, he said, he stated only that he had not been harmed in any way. This apparently satisfied the police officers, and they allowed him to go. According to Durdymuradov, the police set no preconditions for his release, though they told him not to "exaggerate or tell lies."

#### A CHANCE TO VISIT PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC

¶11. (C) EmbOff asked Durdymuradov if he intends to continue working with RFE/RL. Durdymuradov replied that he had filled out the paperwork and is waiting to hear back from Prague. Durdymuradov also provided the phone number of Geldi, the MNB officer, telling EmbOff that Geldi had told him a visit to the psychiatric clinic could potentially be arranged to see the conditions firsthand.

¶12. (SBU) CHARGE'S COMMENT: There is no question that the Government of Turkmenistan was in the wrong to detain Durdymuradov and send him to a psychiatric facility because of his political views and association with RFE/RL. Given the lack of any visible evidence that Durdymuradov was tortured or under any kind of psychological duress, we accept his version of what happened as the approximate truth. That he was released after several interventions by the Embassy is encouraging. However, I am disturbed by the role RFE/RL played in this saga by reporting that Durdymuradov was tortured, including being subjected to electro-shock, and that the information supposedly was sourced to Durdymuradov's immediate family members. If RFE/RL cannot afford to hire reasonably professional reporters, then it probably needs to reconsider how it broadcasts to Turkmenistan. One more important element: as I have reported repeatedly, most recently in reftel F, the horrendous reputation Turkmenistan well earned under former President Niyazov will take years to live down. If I was prepared to believe Durdymuradov had

been tortured, then it was even an easier leap for international editors who had never set foot in Turkmenistan to pick up the "usual report of torture in Turkmenistan." This kind of inaccurate and sensationalist RFE/RL reporting harms our efforts to build trust and nudge Turkmenistan in the right direction on democracy and human rights. The Government of Turkmenistan does not make our nice distinction of RFE/RL as an independent voice; it knows the U.S. Government fully funds RFE/RL and leaps to the conclusion that what it reported is the official U.S. Government position. For RFE/RL to regain credibility in Turkmenistan, I would ask that it consider broadcasting a retraction of its torture report.

¶13. CHARGE'S COMMENT CONTINUED: For full disclosure, I hosted a lunch for like-minded ambassadors on July 10 and reported this denouement. The Western European ambassadors were somewhat skeptical that Durdymuradov did not report to us under duress, although none had met with him, as we did. The former Soviet-state ambassadors -- Georgia and Ukraine -- dismissed the entire story from beginning to end as a clever and sophisticated -- and ultimately successful -- operation by the Government of Turkmenistan to manipulate the U.S. Government. We stand by our analysis. END CHARGE'S COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND